United Nations

Press Release

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations to take over allied refugee camps in northern Iraq.

- Secretary-General recommends cost of United Nations Mission for referendum in Western Sahara to be borne by Member countries.

- Secretary-General says United Nations "master plan" is being drawn up in cooperation with affected Governments to ameliorate consequences of Chernobyl nuclear accident.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar told the Security Council this afternoon that he had asked a number of senior officials, including his personal representative Jean-Claude Aimé, to go to Geneva this weekend for consultations with his Executive Delegate, Sadruddin Aga Kahn, and the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata. The aim was to work out a timetable for the establishment of the United Nations humanitarian centres.

He said the refugee camps set up by American, British and French forces on Iraqi territory would be taken over by United Nations staff as soon as possible in accordance with the Baghdad Agreement of 18 April between the Iraqi Government and the United Nations.

In order to speed up the relief process, a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) convoy of relief commodities would be directed into northern Iraq from Turkey on Monday. A second convoy would travel to the same region from Baghdad on the same day. Together, he said, the two convoys would set up facilities for distribution and storage of the relief commodities, and would discuss modalities for the take-over of the allied camps.

In a separate development, a United Nations official said today that United Nations civilian offices in Iraq and Iran (UNOSGI) had begun an investigation of alleged violations at the two countries' border in response to a request by the Iraqi Government.

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The Secretary-General had proposed in a report of 26 February to the Security Council -- which it endorsed -- the establishment in Iran and Iraq of civilian offices which would also include a few military observers for the purpose of investigating and helping resolve difficulties of a military nature which may arise at the border.

The spokeswoman for the Secretary-General said he was following very carefully the developments on the border between the two countries, and would recommend to the Council, if the situation so required, an increase in the number of military observers.

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In other news today, the Security Council met in informal consultations to discuss the situation in El Salvador, including the Secretary-General's report recommending the establishment of a United Nations mission in the country to verify observance of human rights. The Council was also scheduled to discuss the procedures for the election of the Secretary-General, and to consider article 50, which states that countries faced with economic hardship due to the imposition of sanctions shall have the right to consult the Council with regard to a solution.

The Secretary-General has asked the Security Council to authorize, as soon as possible, the establishment of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to supervise free and fair elections in the territory.

The Council is currently considering a report by the Secretary-General containing a plan for the settlement of the question, accepted by both the Kingdom of Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO).

In a statement during Council consultations yesterday, he said that no effort had been spared in seeking to achieve savings in the estimated expenditures for MINURSO. The overall cost of the mission was at present estimated at $200 million, including expenditures for the repatriation programme of the High Commissioner for Refugees amounting to some $34 million, to be financed from voluntary contributions.

The Secretary-General stressed that the voluntary contributions needed for the repatriation programme must be paid in full before the deployment of MINURSO, since the return of refugees was crucial to the operation's success. He said he was currently holding consultations with certain Member States on this subject.

The Secretary-General further recommended that, pending the Council's approval, the expenditures of MINURSO should be considered as expenses of the Organization to be borne by member countries.

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Today marks the fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion which resulted in the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people from the Ukranian town due to the threat of radioactivity.

In a statement on this occasion, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar welcomed the initiatives taken by the Governments of the Soviet Union, Byelorussia and the Ukraine in calling upon the United Nations system to join with them in efforts to ameliorate the consequences of the accident.

Without precedent in history, he said, the accident had significant and educative effects. It had raised the global consciousness of the dangers shared by peoples in the East, West, North and South and had resulted in the recognition of the need for greater international cooperation to ensure the safety of nuclear energy.

The Secretary-General went on to say that several specialized agencies of the United Nations system had already undertaken significant measures, including the drawing up of a "master plan" of the assistance needed. The document would be presented at a pledging conference, over which he would preside. In closing, the Secretary-General repeated his appeal for help for the victims of the disaster, which, he said, would continue to cause suffering far into the future.

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